

**LIVING GODS WILL**

**Vessel of God**

**JACOB**



**Jacob Being Shown Joseph's Robe by Jan Victors**

**Born:**            2006 BC, Canaan

**Died:**            1859 BC, Egypt (at age 147)

**Jacob** was the fraternal twin brother of **Esau**.

**Jacob** was the son of **Isaac** and **Rebekah**.

**Jacob** had his name changed to **Israel** by God

**Jacob** wrestled with an **Angel**.

**Jacob's** life began with a struggle. As a twin in the womb with **Esau**, he jostled for position and was born grasping his brother's heel. **Jacob's** name is translated as "he deceives" (**Genesis 25:26**).

When his mother, Rebekah, asked **God** during her pregnancy what was happening to her, **God** told her that there were two nations within her womb who would become divided. One would be stronger than the other, and the older would serve the younger (**Genesis 25:23**).

**Jacob** and Esau grew up together living a nomadic life. Esau became a fine hunter and loved to be out in the countryside while **Jacob** "was content to stay at home among the tents" (**Genesis 25:27**). Esau, being a hunter, was his father's favorite as Isaac loved the wild game Esau brought home, while **Jacob** was favored by his mother (**Genesis 25:28**).

This destructive favoritism would follow the family into the next generation, most notably with **Jacob's** son Joseph. Such was **Jacob's** favoritism for Joseph that it caused great resentment among his brothers and nearly cost Joseph his life.

When Isaac was old and his eyesight faded, he thought he was near to his death and made arrangements with Esau to pass on to him the blessings due to the firstborn son (**Genesis 27:1-4**). On hearing this, Rebekah devised a plan to deceive Isaac into blessing Jacob instead.

Thus, **Jacob** received his father's blessing in Esau's place. Esau vowed he would kill **Jacob** for this as soon as the period of mourning for his father's death ended (**Genesis 27:41**). As it turned out, his father did not die for about another twenty years (**Genesis 35:27-29**).

However, Rebekah became aware of Esau's plan and warned **Jacob**. Rebekah also told Isaac that **Jacob** should find himself a wife from among his own people, so Isaac sent **Jacob** to his uncle Laban who lived in their ancestral home of Haran (**Genesis 27:43**).

During Jacob's journey, he had a dream of a ladder to heaven with **God** at the top and angels ascending and descending.

This imagery is mirrored in **Jesus'** words to His disciple Nathanael (**John 1:51**). **God** gave **Jacob** the assurance of His presence and reiterated His promise to Abraham (**Genesis 28:13-15**). As a result of this experience, **Jacob** renamed the place "**Bethel,**" meaning "**house of God,**" and he vowed to serve **God**.

After **Jacob** settled in Haran, Laban offered him payment for the work he had been doing as a shepherd looking after his flocks. **Jacob** offered to work for Laban for seven years in return for Laban's daughter Rachel, whom he loved deeply.

However, **Jacob** was to discover that his uncle Laban could be just as much a deceiver as he had been. On **Jacob's** wedding night, Laban substituted his older daughter, Leah, for Rachel (**Genesis 29:23-25**).

However, Laban agreed to give **Jacob** Rachel as well, provided **Jacob** finish the wedding week with Leah before taking Rachel as a wife, and then work another seven years for him. **Jacob** agreed to this plan. While both women remained **Jacob's** wives, **Jacob** loved Rachel more than Leah (**Genesis 29:30**), a source of continued family strife.

While Rachel remained barren, Leah gave birth to **Jacob's** firstborn son, Reuben. Then followed the birth of eleven more sons from Leah, Rachel, and their two handmaidens. These sons would be the progenitors of the twelve tribes of Israel. After the birth of Joseph, Rachel's first child and **Jacob's** eleventh, **Jacob** asked Laban to send him back to his homeland.

Laban asked **Jacob** to remain, telling him to name his wages. **Jacob** requested only the specked and spotted sheep and goats from all Laban's flocks that he tended, to make flocks of his own. It is unclear how or why it worked, but **Jacob** put striped branches in front of the flocks when they mated, and it resulted in specked and spotted offspring that he could claim for himself.

**Jacob** did this only with the strong animals so that his flocks grew strong while Laban had weak flocks (**Genesis 30:31-43**). **Jacob** recognized that Laban and Laban's sons' attitude toward him had changed. It was then that **God** commanded **Jacob** to return to the land of his fathers accompanied by His promise, "**And I will be with you**" (**Genesis 31:3**).

**Jacob** left Haran, taking with him his wives and children and all the vast flocks he had accumulated. When Laban learned that **Jacob** left, he pursued him. But **God** told Laban in a dream to "**be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad**" (**Genesis 31:24**). Laban did ask **Jacob** why he'd left secretly and spoke of his power to harm Jacob were it not for **God's** warning.

He also accused **Jacob** of stealing his household idols. Continuing the legacy of deception, Rachel who had taken the idols unbeknownst to **Jacob**, concealed them from her father during his search. Laban and **Jacob** eventually parted company after swearing an oath not to invade one another's lands.

Next **Jacob** had to face his brother, Esau. Though twenty years had passed since they had last seen each other, the memory of Esau's threat to kill **Jacob** had never left him (**Genesis 32:11**). **Jacob** sent messengers ahead of him with gifts, instructing them to tell Esau that he was following after. The messengers returned to **Jacob**, telling him that Esau was coming to meet him along with four hundred men.

Afraid that Esau was coming to destroy him, **Jacob** divided his family into two groups, hoping at least one group could escape attack. **Jacob** prayed for **God** to save him, reminding **God** that He had sent **Jacob** back to the land of Abraham and had promised to make him prosper and his descendants numerous (**Genesis 32:9-12**).

**Jacob** selected more gifts for Esau, which he sent ahead with servants in waves, hoping to pacify Esau. That night he sent his wives and sons away from him as well. While alone, in the middle of the night and afraid for his life, **Jacob** wrestled with a man who he later learned was **God** (**Genesis 32:22-31**).

The man touched **Jacob's** hip, putting it out of socket, but at daybreak **Jacob** still refused to let the man go. He asked for a blessing and was told, "**Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome**" (**Genesis 32:28**).

**Jacob** asked the man his name and then understood that He was **God**. **Jacob** named the place Peniel, recognizing that He had seen **God** and yet **God** had spared his life. This wrestling match and name change marked a new beginning for **Jacob**.

The reunion with Esau was not the attack he had feared: "**Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept**" (**Genesis 33:4**). Esau offered to accompany **Jacob** the rest of the way.

**Jacob** refused, citing the size of his family. **Jacob** also refused Esau's offer to leave some of his men with the group. It seems that **Jacob** did not fully trust his brother Esau, and so, instead of meeting Esau in Seir, **Jacob** took his family another route where they finally purchased a plot of land and settled in El Elohe Israel or "**Mighty is the God of Israel.**"

Though he had been given a new name, **Jacob** the deceiver was still wary of others who might be trying to deceive him. Here we see that the mind of those who plot to deceive is always suspicious of the motives of others and can never fully be at rest.

**Genesis 34** records the rape of **Jacob's** only daughter, Dinah, and the revenge her brothers Simeon and Levi carried out on the rapist's entire community. Once again, we see how the deviousness of the parents is passed on to the children in the deceitful way they overcame their enemy.

**Jacob** was angry with his sons and, in obedience to **God's** guidance, moved his family back to Bethel (**Genesis 35:1**) where **God** reappeared to **Jacob** and confirmed His blessing (**Genesis 35:9-13**).

In **Jacob's** meeting with **God**, he received the promise that kings and many nations would come from him and that the land **God** had promised his forefathers would be his inheritance (**Genesis 35:11-12**).

**Jacob** and his family later moved from Bethel to Eder. On the way, Rachel gave birth to her second son, **Jacob's** twelfth—Benjamin. Rachel died in childbirth. **Jacob** was reunited with his father, Isaac, in Mamre. When his father died, both **Jacob** and Esau buried him.

Similar to his mother, **Jacob** also had favorites. Rachel was his favorite wife, and her children—Joseph and Benjamin—were his favorite sons. In fact, Joseph was so favored that his brothers became jealous and sold him into slavery. But **God** was with Joseph, and he eventually fared well in Egypt and rescued his family, **Jacob** included, from famine.

**Jacob** died in Egypt and was embalmed at Joseph's request (**Genesis 49:29—50:3**). Joseph and his brothers took **Jacob's** body back to Canaan to be buried alongside Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah.

Prior to his death, **Jacob** had blessed his twelve sons and requested to be buried in the cave that Abraham had bought for burial. **Jacob** had also blessed Joseph's two sons, giving the blessing of the firstborn to the younger son. Unlike his father who had been deceived into giving the blessing of the firstborn to **Jacob**, **Jacob** crossed his hands to purposefully give the uncustomary blessing.

The similarities in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and **Jacob** are striking. In their stories we see the importance of family and the influence of example. Themes like deceit, favoritism, family strife, unexpected blessing, reconciliation, and faith flow through the narratives. Mostly, we see that **God** is faithful to His promises.

He chooses to accomplish His kingdom purposes through sinful people who are willing to believe Him. He can make those sinful people new—giving Abram the name Abraham, **Jacob** the name Israel, and making those who believe in **Jesus** new creations (**2 Corinthians 5:17**).

Though our sinful patterns might still plague us, in **Jesus** we find forgiveness for our sins as well as power to overcome. We are invited to participate in **God's** work in the world. We have new names and can trust the promises of the **God** who proves Himself faithful time and time again.

**Jacob's** name, "deceiver," does seem to characterize much of **Jacob's** life. But he was also **Israel**, one to whom **God** made promises to which He remained faithful. **God** appeared to **Jacob**, and **Jacob** believed **God's** promises.

Despite **Jacob's** faults, **God** chose him to be the leader of a great nation that still bears his name today. But for this, it is unlikely that we would know much about **Jacob**, who appears to be in the middle of events while the key players are those around him.



There is no great wisdom or bravery in **Jacob** to speak of, and we are tempted to see him as little more than **God's** passive instrument. If we are tempted to think that, because we aren't in the spotlight performing great acts for **God**, we are unimportant to Him, then we should consider the life of **Jacob** and know that, in spite of our failings, **God** can and will still use us in His plan.

### **SUPPORTING SCRIPTURE**

**Genesis 25:26** Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

**Genesis 25:27** So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

**Genesis 29:30** Then Jacob also went in to Rachel, and he also loved Rachel more than Leah. And he served with Laban still another seven years.

**Genesis 32:27** So He said to him, "What is your name?" He said, "Jacob." And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed."

**Genesis 32:24** Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him.



**An Elderly Isaac Blessing Jacob by Govert Flinck**